



### Leader's Report to Council – 27<sup>th</sup> July 2016

Three weeks ago today the Wyre Forest Leisure centre opened – on time and under budget. I am sure those members who visited either on the study tour or since it opened will agree that it is a superb facility, of which the Council and its Members can be proud. There has been almost universally positive feedback from users, and I am told that the facilities are being very well used, including new features such as the spin cycle room, 5-a-side pitches and the climbing walls. This is an excellent project that has provided modern facilities for Wyre Forest residents and at significantly lower cost than the management fee for the previous leisure centres. I would like to pay tribute to Kay Higman and all staff involved in the project team on the successful completion of this major project, and also to our delivery partners Places for People together with the excellent construction team from Pellikaan.

Following approval of the development framework for the Kidderminster Eastern Gateway by Cabinet on 12 July, an options appraisal to examine demolition of The Glades is in preparation. We are keen to see redevelopment of this important area of the town centre get under way with a mixed use development including leisure, residential and retail provision. The sale of the Stourport leisure centre site is expected to be completed shortly, now that we have secured vacant possession following the departure of the family of travellers that had been occupying one of the car parks.

The town centre improvements in Kidderminster are nearing completion. All finishing and remedial works are expected to be concluded before the end of August. While the work has taken longer than originally envisaged, I am sure Members would join with me in acknowledging that this part of the town centre now looks much better than it did before and offers a more attractive venue for shoppers and businesses.

Worcestershire's councils are playing their part in the programme to accept Syrian refugees. We have agreed that the county will take about 200 refugees over the lifetime of the Parliament and up to 50 are expected to arrive in 2016. The first two families to be accommodated in Wyre Forest were due to arrive in Kidderminster today but arrangements have been disrupted by the recent attempted coup in Turkey. A revised arrival date has yet to be confirmed and I will notify Members shortly.

The result of the EU referendum continues to have wide-ranging impacts. Local government is a model of stability in comparison to the upheaval at Westminster! One of the consequences has been the appointment of Mark Garnier MP to his first Ministerial role in the Department for International Trade, which builds on his experience as the Prime Minister's trade envoy for Thailand, Burma and Brunei. I would like to congratulate Mark on his appointment and we look forward to working with him in this new role in supporting the economy in Wyre Forest. The appointment of Sajid Javid MP as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will offer Worcestershire's councils the opportunity of greater influence with this department, including the important work being done on local government finance reform and business rates.

We wait to see what long-term impact leaving the EU will have for the national and local economy. North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration will be monitoring the position, and will work with businesses to continue to reassure them about the positive reasons for investing in Wyre Forest. It is good to see the progress with the new distribution and manufacturing facilities for Specsavers, being built at the former Romwire site. It is a significant example of investment we have been able to attract in recent years and has gone ahead without the need for a planning application because of the local development order that we have in place.

We have continued to make excellent progress with letting vacant space at Wyre Forest House. I can announce that Wolverhampton University are taking up occupancy of one of the offices in the Executive Suite from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2016. There is high interest in the remaining space in the former executive suite.

Finally, I would like to record, on behalf of the Council, our thanks and good wishes to Councillor Margaret Sherrey, who resigned recently as Leader of Bromsgrove District Council for health reasons. I had the pleasure of working closely with her over the last two years on a variety of matters for the benefit of the North Worcestershire districts. Councillor Geoff Denaro was elected as Leader of Bromsgrove on 20 July and I look forward to forging an effective working relationship with him.

**Councillor Marcus Hart**  
**Leader of the Council**